



For Immediate Release
June 26, 2019

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Broad approach needed to prevent lead exposure

As the state works to better protect Michigan drinking water and ensure public health, Michigan Section/American Water Works Association encourages policymakers to take a broad approach to preventing lead exposure.

MI/AWWA wants residents to have confidence in the water that leaves their local treatment facility as safe.

“Water systems throughout the state test their water supplies every day to ensure good water quality,” explains Bonnifer Ballard, MI/AWWA executive director. “Public water does not contain lead when it leaves the water treatment facilities. Lead exposure can occur to drinking water, however, due to corrosion of pipes to the home, interior plumbing, solder or fixtures that were made with or that contain lead.”

MI/AWWA says a typical water distribution system can be confusing and people don’t necessarily distinguish between the utilities’ and the homeowner’s responsibility for the water pipes. Recent changes in the lead and copper rule put the responsibility of the piping from the water main under the road to the home’s water meter or 18 inches inside the home, whichever is greater, on the water utility. The plumbing and fixtures inside the home are the homeowner’s responsibility.

“Water utilities test high risk homes during their lead and copper compliance monitoring,” Ballard explains. “We recommend contacting your local water utility regarding your homes risk level. Homes built after 1988 probably do not contain lead pipes or lead solder, but homes built prior to that date may. It is best to have an inspection by a licensed professional to ensure there are no lead pipes or lead solder.”

MI/AWWA notes that as communities are tested for lead, the results do not reflect every home in the community. Homes on the same block in the same neighborhood could test very differently depending on the age and plumbing components of the structures.

“We suggest anyone with a concern should contact their local utility, as results can vary not only from home to home, but across the state from city to county to rural area,” Ballard says. “Also be aware that homes on private wells will not fall under the new Lead/Copper Rules and testing is the responsibility of the property owner.”

MI/AWWA also encourages residents concerned about lead exposure to be aware of other potential sources, such as lead paint, and learn steps they can take to reduce their exposure to lead.

Michigan Section of American Water Works Association is a vital community of nearly 1,700 water professionals in Michigan leading the advancement of water knowledge and improving the value and quality of water in our lives. AWWA is the largest nonprofit, scientific and educational association dedicated to managing and treating water, the world’s most important resource.

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